RESUME OF UTE INDIAN ANNUAL SUN DANCE

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The Sun Dance is an observance of an Indian superstition and the participants must dance continuously without food or drink. The belief is that if the ceremony is continuously followed it will bring new life and blessings from the Sun God. It takes place around a tree trunk, or pole, in the center of a circular pavilion, with booths or resting places for the exhausted braves. Atop the tree trunk, or pole, is a buffalo head or some similar emblem. The participation dance back and forth toward the center pole of the pavilion to the accompaniment of drums and the chanting of men and women of the tribe. A banqueting which often lasts two days closes the dance.

More than any other of the Ute (and other plains' Indian) ceremonies, this dance furnishes the tribe the opportunity for expression of emotion in rhythm, and is the occasion of more closely uniting the tribe. It gives opportunity for the making and renewing of common interests and policies; for the exhibition, by means of mourning feasts, of grief over the loss of members of the family; for the fulfillment of social obligations by means of feasts, and, finally, for the exercise and gratification of love on the part of the young in the various social affairs which always form an interesting feature of the ceremony.

In the ritual of the dance, it is stated that once in a period of famine an individual wandered forth with a female companion in behalf of his tribe, encountered a diety, fasted, learned the ceremony, returning to the tribe, caused the ceremony to be performed, and thus brought relief from famine through the appearance of the buffalo. The ceremony accordingly may be regarded as one of rebirth or reanimation.

In this ceremony, the sacred tepee is often spoken of as the rabbit or lone tepee of the Morning Star. The camp circle symbolizes the constellation Corna Borealis—the camp circle of the Gods above. It also symbolizes the horizon, standing for the universe. The lodge itself represents the earth as home of man. The altar symbolizes the essence of life or spring of fertilization. In the fork of the center pole, or tree, was the nest of the thunderbird. Into this nest a digging stick was usually thrust, symbolic of that used by the woman who, in the well known tale climbed to the sky in pursuit of a porcupine and later gave birth to the Sun Boy.

While the center pole itself, with its bands of red and black paint, is symbolic of earth and heaven, and typifies the supreme medicine or mystery, it may be regarded as a symbolizing also, especially at the time of its capture, the common enemy. It is indeed asserted that from the fork of the center pole was formerly suspended alive an enemy captured in war. The dancers collectively overcome an enemy, generally the sun, and by their medicine compel the thunderbird to release rain.

The wreaths worn by the dancers are symbols of the sun and moon; the four men in the dance represent the gods of the four world quarters, while the paints applied to the body, usually four in number, are progressive in their virtue, generally culminating in a black paint, which may be regarded as defying the rain to wash it off. The painted designs are symbols of the sun, the moon, the morning star and the gods of the four world-quarter.

The whistling symbolizes the breath of life, of man and at the same time the cry of the thunder bird. Vomiting and sweating are employed as purification rites. The fasting and other denials are penance, done to obtain special favor of the gods and represent the fast of the originator of the ceremony.

This dance as seen among the Utes at Whiterocks in the Uintah basin in Northeastern Utah, annually, is a tame affair compared with the Sun Dance that some of us saw acted out forty years ago.

At that time, after all the preparations had been made the dancers, who had been painted and decked with sage or willow wreaths about the head, neck, waist, wrists and ankles, formed a line, as they do now, and danced toward the center pole, representing the sun, blowing whistles made of wing bones of eagles to accompany the Sun Dance songs, which were sung by musicians seated about a large drum at the south side of the entrance to the pavilion. After an interval, which might be a day, the paint was removed and renewed and the ceremony was renewed and to the end the dancers thus alternately danced and rested. At the close of the dance the dancers in some tribes took an emetic, drank medicine water, broke their fast and then entered the sweat lodge.

In all the tribes so far as is known, the lodge with its accompanying altar was (and still is) abandoned to the elements, for it is considered sacred and must not be disturbed. Among the several taboos of the ceremony, one of the most frequent and almost universal was that forbidding the presence of menstruating women.

In the majority of the tribes one of the most common rites of the public performance was that of voluntary self-laceration or torture. The two most common forms of torture were (1) to attach the free end of a reata that had been fastened to the center fork of the lodge, to a skewar inserted in the loose skin of the breast, and (2) to drag around inside the camp circle one or more buffalo skulls by a reata, the other end of which was attached to a skewer inserted in the back. In some tribes a small piece of flesh was cut from the arm or shoulder of the dancer and was offered with tobacco seeds at the foot of the center pole.

The amount of torture performed seemed to have been greatest among the Mandan and Cheyenne. Torture in any form, however, was not tolerated by the Kiawa; indeed, the appearance of blood was regarded by him as an ill omen, and it is said sometimes to have caused the ceremony to cease.

A form of sacrifice other than torture, consisting in the offering of the cast off clothing of children or adults to the lodge on the last day, was practiced by several tribes, especially those of the Algonquian stock. The Sun Dance having been strongly opposed by the missionaries because it was utterly misunderstood, and finding no favor in official circles, was for many years an object of persecution, and in consequence is extinct among the Dakotas, the Crows, and the Mandan, of the Souan stock, and the Kiawa. It is still more or less performed by the Cree, Siksika, Arapaho, Cheyenne and among the Pawnee and the Assiniboin, Ponca, Shoshoni, and Ute. Its disappearance among certain of these tribes, such as the Ponca, is near at hand, for it has lost part of its rites and has come to be largely a spectacle for gain rather than a great religious ceremony.

Myth Figures in Sun Dance.

The Pipe Stone Quarry myth figures a great part in the Sun Dance ceremonies of the Indians. One version of this interesting myth hete follows:

Gitchie Manito (the Great Spirit) re-created all things of earth, after which he rested many many suns. He then returned to find that the men of earth, as in a previous earth time, were almost continually in trouble with one another and that now and then there were terrible wars. Something had to be done to stop the quarrels and wars. Some place had to be set apart where all and everyone could live in peace, where all could live as brothers.

He then spent many years traveling over the earth trying to better the condition of mankind. A last he chose the Catlinite ridge at what is now Pipe Stone, Minnesota, where in a previous earth age, the assembled nations of the world, in battle, had stained the rocks red with their blood and had there all perished but three maidens (three large glacial boulders now at the site, one of them is alleged to have been the "jealous woman" in other versions) from which the present race of men sprang. Here he called all the people and when they had appeared before him, he said: "This place shall always be held and owned in common by all the people. It shall be neutral ground to all. Here all shall bury the tomahawk. Here there shall always be peaace. In this region there shall be peace henceforth. The murmuring falls of Winnewassa, here, shall be our witness. From the rocks here, rocks which I have made sacred, you will make your pipes of long stem which you shall smoke at all gatherings as a pipe of peace, as I now fashion and smoke this one before you, using red willow bark as the 'tobacco' to be smoked.

"To this place you shall make an annual pilgrimage and as often as you meet here you shall smoke the pipe of peace. We will to the sun erect a shrine at the falls and when you come here I will speak to you through the murmuring waters."

Through the ages as they came and went, the Red Nations visited this quarry and made and smoked their pipes of peace. They also listened to Gitchie Manito as he talked to them through the falling waters. And there was always peace in the region, whatever was happening elsewhere, and the smoking the pipe of peace meant the burying of the tomahawk then and there. Thus did they as the Master of Life told them, and as a consequence they prospered.

Many of the tribes used and some still use elaborate dry sand paintings in the ceremony. Some of these paintings were often ten or more feet in diameter. Among these people, in order to prepare the ground work for the sacred picture in the lodge, several men collect with ceremonial observance, a quantity of dry sand, which is carried in baskets, thrown on the floor of the lodge, spread over the surface of sufficient size and depth or two or three inches, and made smooth and level by means of broad battoons. The pigments used are white, blue, yellow, black and red. The white, yellow and red are made of finely powdered sandstone of those colors; the black of powdered charcoal mixed with a little sandstone to give it stability and the "blue" (really dark gray), of black and white mixed.

The powders are prepared before the picture is begun and are kept in improvised trays or other containers. To apply the pigments the artist picks up a small quantity between his first and second fingers and his opposed thumb and allows it to flow slowly as he moves his hand. When he takes up his pinch of powder, he blows on his fingers to remove aberrant particles and to keep them from falling on the picture, out of place. When he makes a mistake he does not brush away the colored powder, but obliterates it by pouring sand on it, then draws the correct design on the new surface. The drawings are begun as near the center of the design as the drawing he is making will permit, due regard being paid to the points of the compass. The figures in the periphery of the picture are made last, in order that the operators may not have to step over and thus possibly spoil the finished work.

The dry painting made by the Arapaho in their Sun Dance ceremony, while of symbolic significance, is of quite simple character while that of the Cheyenne is more elaborate. With the latter, the field of the painting is of pure, plain sand, and the design is made in a strictly prescribed manner by the use of black, red, yellow and white dry paint, in order. Dotted lines representing stars form part of the painting, in this case those in white being drawn first because the white stars "appear first in the morning." The unbroken lines are roads; the white represents the lodge maker and his wife, the red line the road of the Cheyenne, the black, the trail of the buffalo and the yellow the path of the sun.

Buffalo Head Dance Part of Sun Dance Ceremony.

The buffalo head dance ceremony dovetailed in as the act between the smoking the pipe of peace, following the strenuously acted out war dance and the Sun Dance acts proper among several of the tribes.

Among the Cheyennes it was one of the major acts of the Sun Dance ceremony, the altar being an elaborate arrangement of a buffalo skull, an excavation with a dry sand painting, upright sticks with rainbow symbols and various bushes and young trees, while among the Ponca it was usually a simple buffalo skull and a pipe on a cleared circle of earth. The Mandan and other Siousan tribes also had the buffalo dance in conjunction with the sun dance ceremonies, and also at other times to bring food, in accordance with a well defined ritual, the ceremony among the Mandan being very elaborate.

In preparation for the ceremony, the latter people wore at the back of the head a long, stiff ornament made of small sticks, entwined with wire (after the advent of the white.) This was fastened to the hair and reached down to the shoulders, the ornament being covered with porcupine quills dyed in various colors in neat patterns. At the upper end of this ornament an eagle feather was fastened horizontally the quill end of which was covered with red cloth and the tip ornamented with a bunch of horse hair dyed yellow. In addition symbolic figures, amid parallel black stripes, were painted on the arms and left breast.

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When all was in readiness, the dance was had in circular fo often around a center pole which a buffalo head was pla In this act, besides being orated as given above, the participants donned whole buf skins, or only the head part, their fancy desired or as part in the ceremony dict Then acting as a buffalo, coys, or as hunters, as were respective parts, the dance on. The buffalo actors pa scraped and loudly bellowed, ternating with "galloping" tics and more extravagant lowing. The decoys lik jumped vigorously and about among the unsuspe "animals" and the hunters, mimicry which looked real their buffalo with arrow or let, or rushed in on him thrust him through with points.

Thus did the dance work frenzy equal to that of the war dance of their tribe, An last pretended dying bellow the "wounded buffalos" adde the realisticness of the danc should be added that the bu skulls used in this act wer skulls that were dragged by the prospective braves b buckskin cord or a horse rope which was attached t to the flesh of their breast their backs in the torture mony of the next act of the dance.